TRAVELER'S BRIEFING

BULGARIA

REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA)

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BACKGROUND

Full Name: Republic of Bulgaria

Capital: Sofia

Population: 8,194,772 (est)

Type of government: Republic

Head of government: Pres. Petr Stoyano

PM Ivan Kostov

Official language(s) Bulgarian

Economy: Socialist transforming into capitalist

Religions: Bulgarian Orthodox (85%) Muslim (13%)

TRAVEL

Travel restrictions: None.

International Airport: Vrazhdebna-Sofia

Flights from Frankfurt: Balkan-Bulgarian, Czech, Malev, LOT-P KLM Royal Dutch, Air France

Other methods of arrival: Road, rail

U.S. Embassy address: 1 Suborna Street, Sofia
Tel: 359-2-980-5241/5242/5243/5244/5245; FAX: 359-2-981-89

Transportation: Public transportation: Fair.

Urban Roads/Maintenance: Fair.

Rural roads/Maintenance: Poor to fair.

Availability of roadside assistance: Poor to fair. The Bulgarian road system is underdeveloped. There are few sections of limited-access divided highway. Some roads are in poor repair and full of potholes. Rockslides and landslides

ENTRY/EXIT

Travel Necessities: Bulgaria is designated a Special Area. Official travel requires approval from DoS. A country clearance is required. U.S. Passport and visa are required. Official passports also require a visa. Tourist passports do not require visas if stay is under 30 days. Travelers must keep passports and visas with them at all times. Visa applications require 3 photos and three applications. They are valid for 60 days or length of stay and are good for one entrance only. Seven working days are needed to process application. Visas may be obtained at ports of entry/border crossings for $23

All personnel are subject to normal customs procedures. Bulgaria's customs authorities encourage the use of an ATA (Admission Temporaire/Temporary Admission) Carnet for the temporary admission of professional equipment, commercial samples, and/or goods for exhibitions and fair purposes

Personal effects, including typewriter, and reasonable amounts of tobacco, cigarettes and cigars may be brought in duty-free. Travelers should also declare jewelry, cameras, computers, and other valuables to avoid difficulties on

HELPFUL HINTS

Special restrictions: Photographing of airport, military and industrial facilities, and military equipment/material is prohibited.

Tourist facilities are widely available although conditions vary and some facilities may not up to Western standards. Goods and services taken for granted in other European countries are still not available in many areas of Bulgaria. Heavy truck traffic along the two-lane routes from the Greek border at Kulata to Sofia and from the Turkish border at Kapitan Andreevo to Plovdiv creates numerous hazards. Motorists should expect long delays at border crossings. A U.S. state driver’s license is not considered valid for Bulgaria; only an international driver’s license is accepted. Persons operating vehicles with foreign license plates frequently complain of being stopped by police and being fined on the spot for offenses that are not clear.

MONEY

Currency restrictions: Bulgaria is still a largely cash economy. Visitors should exchange cash at banks or Change Bureaus. Some Change Bureaus charge commissions on both cash and travelers’ check transactions which are not clearly posted. Old, dirty or very worn denomination bank notes are often not accepted at banks or Change Bureaus. Major branches of the following Bulgarian banks will cash travelers’ checks on the spot for Leva, the Bulgarian currency: Bulbank, Bulgarian Postbank, Biochim,First Investment Bank and United Bulgarian Bank (UBB). UBB also serves as a Western Union agent and provides direct transfer of money to travelers in need. ATM cash machines are increasing in numbers in Sofia and other major cities. Most shops, hotels and restaurants, with the exception of the major hotels, still do not accept travelers' checks or credit cards. Currently, travelers carrying more than 10,000 United States dollars must declare the amount of cash they are carrying on their customs declaration. Travelers who have less than $10,000 when entering the country, must have documents proving the

HEALTH

Major threats: diarrhea, respiratory diseases, accidents, arthropod-borne diseases, STDs, cold injuries, industrial pollution and heat injuries (limited).

Availability of medical services:Although Bulgarian physicians are trained to a very high standard, most hospitals and clinics are generally not equipped and maintained at U.S. or Western European levels

Medical Insurance: May not apply in Sofia. Check with your policy advisor to see if you are covered or will be reimbursed.

Status of hospitals: Good, but under-equipped.

Health Precautions:Basic medical supplies are widely available, but specialized treatment may not be obtainable. Serious medical problems requiring hospitalization and/or medical evacuation to theUnited States can cost thousands of dollars or more. Doctors and hospitals often expect immediate

Immunizations: Hep A (recommended), td(recommended), Influenza (recommended) , Typhoid (recommended) . An AIDS test must be taken if staying for more than 1 month for study

FORCE PROTECTION

Country Clearance: Required for all military personnel traveling to Bulgaria. You obtain this by going through your S3/G3 section. This must be done at least 30 days ahead of scheduled visit. DV visits will also be coordinated through G3/S3 channels.

Briefings: AT/FP level I brief from command's Level II trainer or equivalent. Additionally, mine awareness training would be beneficial, although it is not required.

Drink only bottled or treated water. Livestock and animal-drawn carts present road hazards throughout the country. Travel conditions deteriorate during the winter as roads become icy and potholes proliferate. The U.S. Embassy in Sofia advises against night driving because road conditions are more dangerous in the dark. Many roads lack pavement markings and lights, and motorists often drive with dim or

CRIME

Criminal Activities: Petty street crime, much of which is directed against foreigners or others who appear to have money, continues to be a problem. Confidence artists operate on public transportation and in bus and train stations, and travelers should be suspicious of "instant friends" and should also require persons claiming to be officials to show identification. Taxi drivers at Sofia Airport often gouge unwary travelers, and even if they agree to run their meters, the amounts to be paid are much higher than normal. Travelers who pre-negotiate a fare can avoid the more outrageous overcharging. Because incidents of pilferage of checked baggage at Sofia Airport are common, travelers should not include items of value in checked luggage. Automobile theft is also a frequent problem, with four-wheel drive vehicles and late model European sedans the most popular targets. Very

Buses, trams, and trolleys are inexpensive but often crowded an quality. Passengers on the busiest lines have reported pickpock slashing, and backside-pinching.

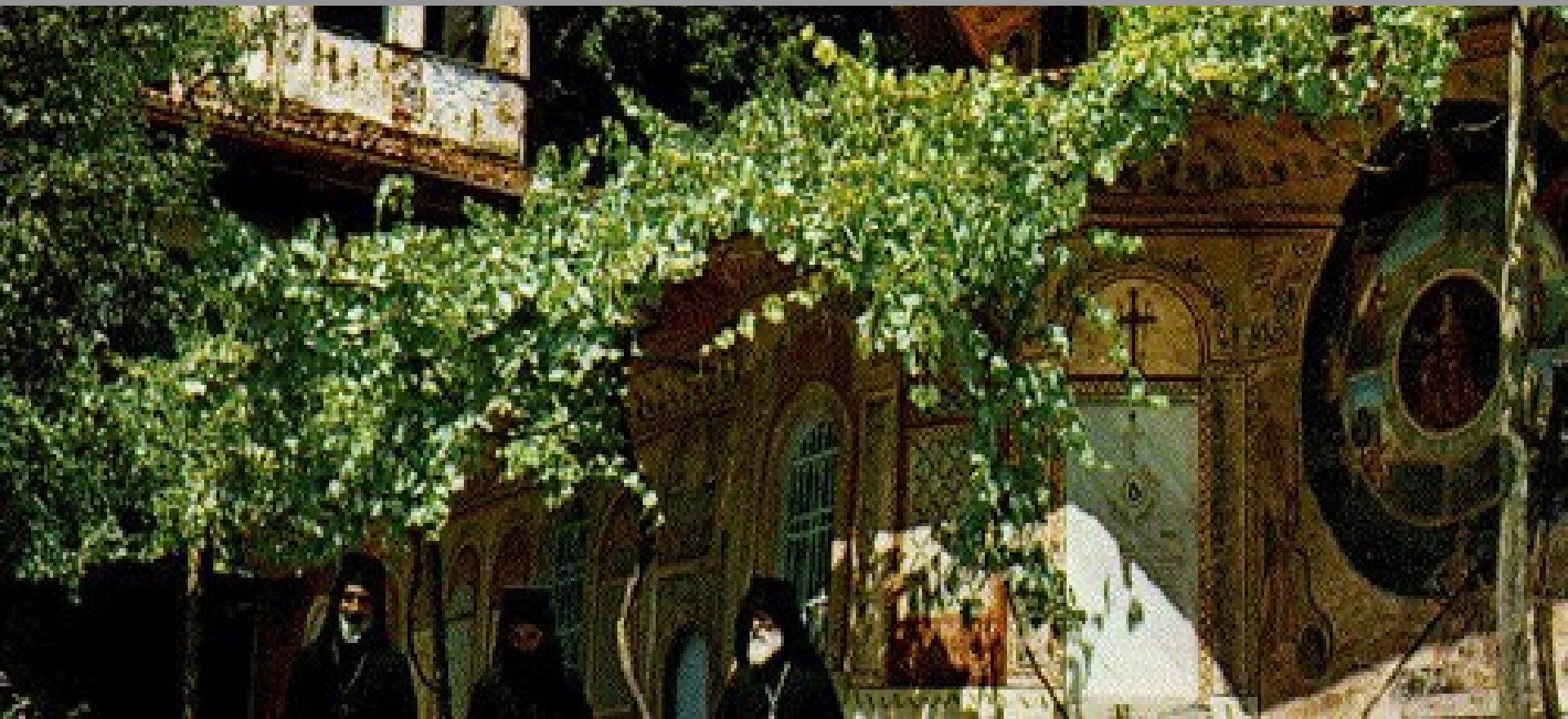
WEATHER

Http://cnn.com/WEATHER/html

CLOTHING

Uniform restrictions: Not applicable. Persons on leave should wear civilian clothing.

Clothing suitable to U.S. Midwest is recommended.



This concludes the TRAVELER'S BRIEFING for

BULGARIA